



European Foundation
for the Improvement of
Living and Working Conditions



European Centre for the
Development of Vocational Training

Fostering mobility through competence development





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'The role of competence and qualification development in fostering workforce mobility'

EMCC Company Network Seminar organised jointly by the European
Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions and
the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training

Thessaloniki, 9–10 November 2006

Conference summary

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Foreword

The European Union designated 2006 as the ‘European Year of Workers’ Mobility’ with the objective of raising awareness about the need to develop the right instruments and conditions to foster high quality mobility in order to achieve the Lisbon employment targets.

It is widely acknowledged that in order to meet these targets, Europe needs its workforce to become more adaptable and resilient in the face of structural change and ongoing restructuring. In this context, lifelong learning and adequate training policies, both on and off the job, are regarded as the best means of ensuring the adaptability and employability of workers, as well as enhancing mobility opportunities.

Initiatives aimed at improving the mobility prospects of European workers require action at all levels and by all parties. Public authorities, social partners and companies themselves are key players in this process and partnership-based approaches will be essential in removing existing barriers to mobility. Modernising and improving the coordination of national welfare systems, achieving higher levels of investment in training, strengthening the role of public employment services to match labour supply and demand and reducing administrative burdens, are areas that need to be urgently addressed.

This report is a joint contribution by the Foundation and Cedefop to a policy debate that is closely associated with the core mission of both agencies: improving the living and working conditions of Europeans through continuous investment in education and training. The report is the outcome of the first joint seminar held in the context of a new framework of cooperation recently signed by both bodies. It aims to contribute to an important policy debate on a topic that increasingly affects labour markets in all Member States and the competitiveness of the EU as a whole.

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Introduction

The aim behind the 2006 ‘European Year of Workers’ Mobility’ by the European Union was to raise awareness of the benefits of workers’ mobility to individuals, companies and economies.

Workers’ mobility is closely linked to the development of competences and qualification. Mobility enhances competence development which benefits their employers and the economy as a whole, while, in turn, people with a broader set of competences and qualifications have better chances on the labour market.

Joint seminar on mobility

In November 2006, the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions and the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) organised a Company Network seminar on the subject of ‘the role of competence and qualification development in fostering workforce mobility’ in Thessaloniki. It was the first joint event of the two agencies in the framework of a recently signed cooperation agreement.

The seminar set out to explore the implementation and role of company training programmes and the type of skills and competences that employees are gaining as a result of these initiatives. It also analysed the link between corporate training schemes and mobility policies at the company level in order to investigate the extent to which these genuinely promote the mobility of workers.

The seminar opened with a series of presentations setting out the policy context and summarising current research on workers’ mobility in Europe based on the results of a recent Eurobarometer survey. The following session highlighted initiatives that have been undertaken at European, national and sectoral levels to promote the transparency and recognition of qualifications of employees. The second seminar day explored the links between different training approaches and employee mobility within companies.

This seminar report summarises the seminar conclusions and highlights how individuals, companies and policymakers can act to develop schemes that simultaneously promote workers’ mobility and develop their skills.

European Year of Workers' Mobility

The centrality of workers' mobility to the goals of the European Employment Strategy led to a decision by the European Union to dedicate a whole year to promoting awareness of it. It is surprising that, despite its importance, the issue of workers' mobility has only recently attracted the attention of policymakers.

Mobility figures have been static for years. Only four per cent of European citizens have ever moved to another Member State and even within Member States only about half of the European workforce changed employer during the last decade. It is believed that a higher degree of mobility might help to solve the labour market paradox that exists within Europe, whereby some regions experience chronically high unemployment rates whilst others cannot find enough candidates to fill their many (and increasing) job vacancies. Two mechanisms can help to bridge these gaps between supply and demand: economic restructuring can move jobs from regions with labour shortages to regions with a high labour reserve; or, instead of moving the companies to where the unemployed workers are, these workers can be encouraged to migrate to the regions where more jobs are available.

The 'European Year of Workers' Mobility' aimed to remove obstacles that hamper migration within Europe. Some of these barriers are linked to legal or administrative issues such as taxation or social security. Others are of a more practical nature, including the problems of finding housing, learning a new language, or dealing with the impacts of migration on spouses or children. Psychological barriers also play an important role as migrants grapple with unpredictable risks and address questions such as how easy it will be to reverse the move. If the move is temporary, will it add or detract from their employability when they return home? Finally, there is evidence that many people are sceptical about the value of moving to another country, since the experience acquired may not be fully valued or recognised in other Member States.

The EU's drive to promote workers' mobility will continue beyond the 'European Year of Workers' Mobility'. In the future, there are plans to continue preparing people to be mobile by providing information on the advantages of taking such a decision. Specific attention will be given to accompanying movers to their destination country to provide support during the transition. The large EURES network of advisers has an important role to play in this

respect. It is also important to spread awareness that mobility can be temporary decision and to pay more attention to procedures for returning migrants. A focus on return migration can play a part in addressing the issue of brain drain which results from permanent migration. A final goal is to ensure that mobility is fully integrated into European policy so that it is seen as a natural part of the career of Europeans.

Overview of the seminar

About 50 company and trade union representatives, civil servants, policy makers, experts and EU officials came together in Thessaloniki from 9–10 November 2006 to examine how initiatives to develop workers' competences can contribute towards European objectives to promote workers' mobility. The seminar, 'The role of competence and qualification development in fostering workforce mobility', was jointly organised by the European Monitoring Centre on Change (EMCC) within Eurofound and Cedefop.

The introductory presentations set out the policy context of workers' mobility and summarised existing research on the subject of workers' mobility in Europe. The rest of the seminar was mainly devoted to presentations of good practice examples. The afternoon of the first day provided an opportunity to learn about several initiatives undertaken at European and national level aimed at promoting the transparency and recognition of qualifications of employees in the welding, metal and information and communication technologies sectors.

The second day of the seminar focused on the company level and explored the links between different training approaches and employee mobility within enterprises. Four companies presented their mobility policies – the Bank of Cyprus, Telefónica, Electricité de France and Neorion Syros Shipyards.

The issue of international workers' mobility has become very topical as a result of the expansion of the EU. There is a general consensus that workers' mobility can be a good thing for the development of skills and competences. Most companies have yet to develop mobility policies for their entire staff, and usually only consider cross-border mobility in relation to their senior management staff. However, when people move abroad, they usually have to face not only a new language but also other practical barriers. In the next section, actions to reduce these difficulties are discussed.

Job mobility and company policies

Workers' mobility does not usually entail migration across national borders. Because most workers change jobs within the same country, the need to support workers' mobility is not one that is immediately apparent to companies. Most employers prefer their employees to stay with them, if only

to give them a return on the investment they have made in the past in developing their skills and knowledge. Envisaging that their workers will remain in their employment for a long period, many European employers even regard themselves as offering lifetime employment. In return, their employees are expected to develop their competences and qualifications throughout their careers. This implicit contract can be described as flexicurity at the company level.

Enabling mobility through competence development

To ensure the career development of employees, companies usually work out a competence development strategy in order to ensure an ongoing increase in the employability of their staff. Rotating the employees to new jobs, in order to let them learn new tasks and upgrade their skills can form part of such a competence development plan. Insofar as they contribute to such practices, mobility policies can be seen as an integral part of a competence development strategy.

Transparency of competence and qualification development

In the current economic climate, employees are expected to upgrade their skills during their careers, whether through mobility or through learning. However, skills acquired on the job within a company are not always easily visible and the specific requirements of any given job may not be obvious to those not immediately involved in its execution. If their past learning achievements are to be recognised on the labour market, it is important that they are made explicit and recognisable. Tools like the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) are designed to make competences and qualifications more transparent and will help to facilitate workers' mobility in the future and ensure that quality standards are sustained and improved. Whilst workers will not necessarily change employment more often, they will at least be able to change to jobs in which their competences are validated and/or recognised in a better way.

Geographical mobility within the EU

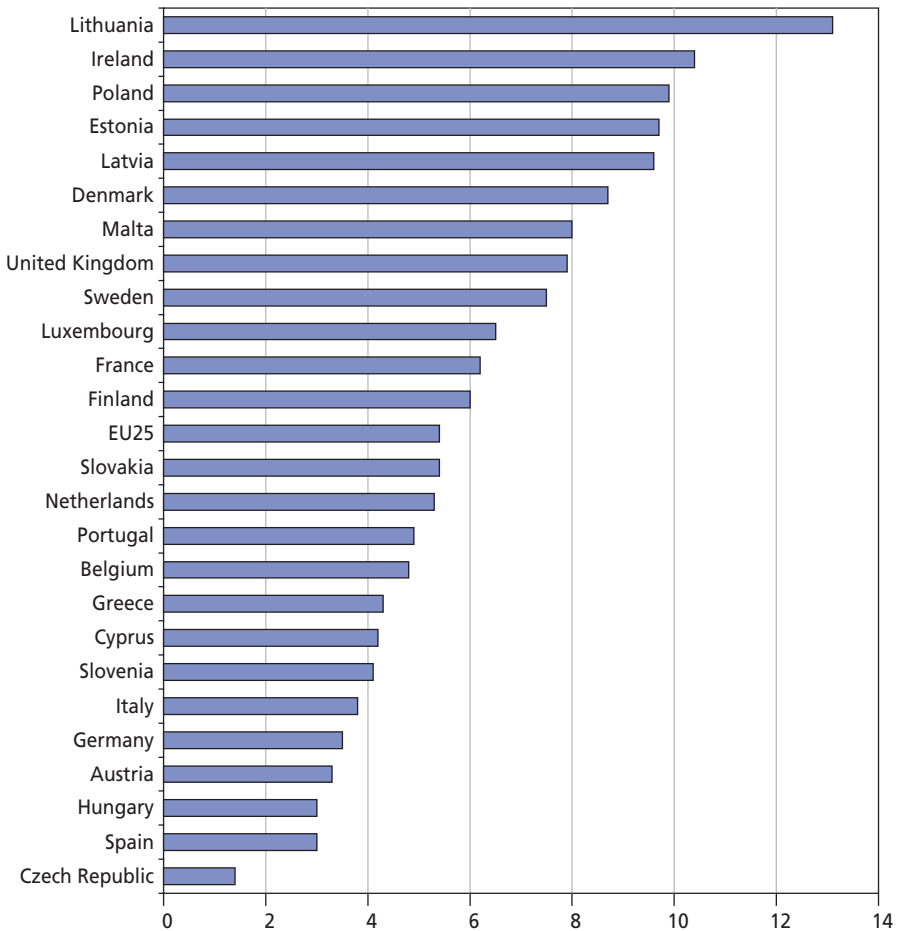
The European Union has enlarged significantly in recent years, with a leap in January 2004 from 15 Member to 25 and a further increase to 27 in January 2007. The majority of the new Member States are situated in eastern Europe with recent experience of a challenging transition from a socialist planned economy to a free market economy. These new Member States are characterised by high unemployment rates and a relatively low GDP per capita. Simple economical reasoning suggests that these inequalities in an enlarged Europe will result in migration streams from the poorer regions in the East to the richer regions in the West. This potential European metamorphosis places the issue of labour mobility prominently on the policy agenda.

Public attitudes to labour mobility in an enlarged Europe

This situation has generated some fears among European citizens in the 'old' Member States. It is reflected in the political decision of most Member States not to open their borders at the time of accession of these Member States, or to open them only partially. EU Member States have adopted transition arrangements to accommodate migration for eight out of ten countries that joined the EU in 2004 (with the exception of Cyprus and Malta). These measures range from opening the border fully to migrants (e.g. the UK and Ireland in 2004), intermediate approaches such as simplified entry criteria (France, Luxembourg and Italy) or selective migration (e.g. Belgium and the Netherlands), to closing the borders until 2009 (e.g. Austria, Germany and Denmark)¹. Several arguments are put forward to justify these restrictions on migration. These include economic arguments ('these migration streams will lead to a disequilibrium on the local labour market; lower skilled employees will be crowded out by migrant workers'), social arguments ('the welfare state will be undermined by the inflow of unemployed new citizens') and cultural concerns ('the national identity is threatened by the integration of large numbers of migrants into our society'). In addition to these fears in receiving

¹ Fouarge D. and Ester P., *Determinants of international and regional migration intentions in Europe*, Dublin: European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (forthcoming in 2007).

Figure 1: Migration intentions in European countries (%)



Source: 2005 Eurobarometer Mobility Survey

countries, there may also be fears of negative impacts in the countries from which migrants originate, resulting in a loss of talent due to a ‘brain drain’.

However, public attitudes are not only shaped by fear caused by migration flows. There is also an awareness of the opportunities that labour migration can bring, at the individual, company and societal levels. Individual workers learn new things by moving abroad, and increase their employability. Companies enlarge their recruitment pools and increase their chances of finding the right person for the job. And national and regional economies gain from greater

mobility that increases diversity in the labour market and injects new ideas into the local economy.

Both fears and expectations of migration flows should not be exaggerated. Although there seems to be a slight increase in the mobility intentions of Europeans², the overall level of expected migration streams is rather moderate. Figure 1 shows migration intentions in Europe on the basis of the 2005 Eurobarometer Mobility Survey³. Only five per cent of Europeans think it is likely that they will move outside their own country in the next five years. Intentions to migrate are the highest in some new Member States (Lithuania, Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Malta). However, they are well below average in others (Slovakia, Slovenia, Hungary, Cyprus and the Czech Republic). In several cases (e.g. Ireland, Denmark and Sweden as well as the Baltic States and Malta) countries showing a high intention of migration are also those with very small populations and the migration intention may be a reflection of the greater employment opportunities in larger neighbouring countries. It is also unclear to what extent these intentions will result in actual migration in the future.

It should also be noted that people with the intention of moving may not be doing so with the primary aim of looking for a new job. Better working conditions and a higher household income are indeed important pull factors for migration, but they are mentioned no more frequently than other motives for migration such as the discovery of a new environment⁴.

Companies and geographical mobility

In general, companies welcome greater mobility. Employers believe that more mobile workers can make it easier to deal with recruitment difficulties because the pool of possible recruits is bigger when not only nationals apply for jobs. Employers do not only look at employees coming from abroad as job candidates; they also encourage their own employees to be mobile. Companies with several divisions in different regions or countries often also consider that a change can be good for their employees, although many only seriously

² Fouarge and Ester, *ibid.*

³ European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, *Mobility in Europe*, 2006.

⁴ European Foundation, *ibid.*

consider senior management and professional staff for such geographical relocation. When recruiting staff at senior management level, 47% of firms consider it to be important that candidates should be open to the option of moving. This percentage drops to 37% for professional staff. The proportion falls considerably when it comes to lower level staff.⁵ International mobility is important for people envisaging a top management position in a multinational organisation where knowing how to work in different cultural environments is increasingly considered to be an essential competence. Internal geographical mobility policies therefore typically focus on senior staff and ignore those lower down the scale.

International mobility in the Bank of Cyprus

‘Most geographical internal mobility is within a country or region. The bank does have an expatriate policy for employees who are transferred to another country for more than six months. However, this policy is very rarely applied because of the high costs of moving people internationally. In fact, this only occurred when top managers were temporarily employed to start up activities in a new foreign affiliate’.

A. Artemiou, Training and Development Manager

Geographical mobility in Electricité de France Group

‘Personal development and building a career within the company remains the most important reason for internal (geographical) mobility.’

J.C. Legros, Regional HR Manager

Perceptions among European citizens

Although only a minority of European citizens expects to migrate to another country, there seems to be a strong belief in the positive outcomes of geographical mobility. Geographical mobility is generally perceived as a ‘good thing’ for European integration by a solid majority of 62% of respondents of the Eurobarometer Mobility Survey. It is furthermore considered to be a good thing for employment-related domains of ‘the labour market’ and ‘the economy’.

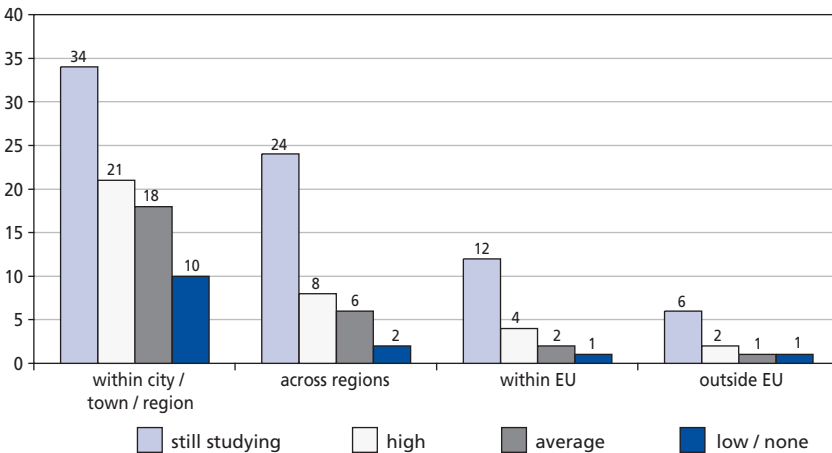
⁵ PriceWaterhouseCoopers, *Managing mobility matters 2006*.

There is, however, more scepticism when it comes to views about the rewards of mobility for family life. Here, a majority of people thinks that mobility would be a bad thing for families. It seems that people are afraid that moving abroad and the process of integrating into a new environment can make major demands on relationships with partners and children.

This finding can help to explain the mobility paradox - the fact that although most European citizens agree that workers' mobility is positive, few are prepared to contemplate such a move themselves. Mobility decisions are not isolated decisions, but have a bounded character. People optimise geographical and job mobility within a predefined context shaped by the needs of their families, social networks and the broader cultural context. It is not surprising that the loss of direct contact and support from family and friends is considered by Europeans to be the most important factor discouraging them from moving to another country.

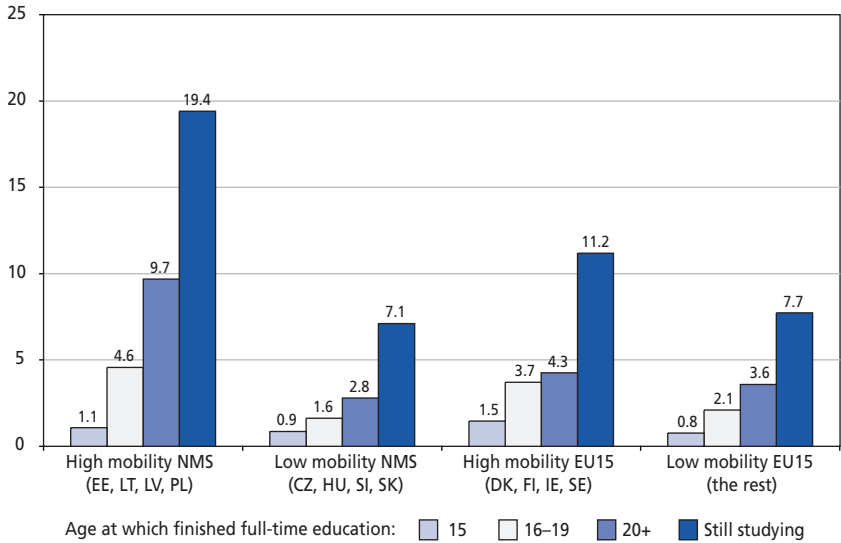
The Eurobarometer results also show that education and training play a part in making Europeans more open to the idea of moving to another country and also makes them more likely to actually do so. Those with higher educational qualifications show a more proactive behaviour when it comes to dealing with

Figure 2: Mobility intention patterns by educational level (%)



Source: European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2006) *Mobility in Europe. Analysis of the 2005 Eurobarometer survey on geographical and labour market mobility* and Cedefop (own elaboration).

Figure 3: Percentage of workers who intend to migrate, by level of education (%)



Source: European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2006), *Mobility in Europe. Analysis of the 2005 Eurobarometer survey on geographical and labour market mobility*

mobility, and persons with high qualifications are twice as likely to have moved as those with low or average educated people is (see Figure 2).

The Eurobarometer results relating to the greater propensity of the highly educated to migrate also supply some substantiation that fears of a ‘brain drain’ may be legitimate in some new Member States in eastern Europe. Although this migration may not be permanent, in the medium term this could have negative consequences for social and regional cohesion in Europe (see Figure 3).

Expected barriers when moving to another Member State

Respondents in the Eurobarometer Mobility Survey were also asked for their views on the greatest difficulties they would have to face in case they did want to move to another EU country⁶. Unsurprisingly, language difficulties are high

⁶ European Foundation, *ibid.*

Table 1: Comparison of the views of workers and employers on obstacles to job mobility

| Workers' views of expected difficulties in moving to another country | Company views of individual factors hindering employee mobility |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lack of language skills (58%) 2. Finding a job (29%) 3. Adapting to a different culture (23%) 4. Finding suitable housing (16%) 5. Accessing health care or social benefits (13%) 6. Transferring pension rights (12%) 7. Recognition of educational and professional qualifications (8%) 8. Obtaining a residency/work permit (8%) 9. Finding a job for one's partner (8%) 10. Access to child care, school, university (4%) 11. Expect no problems (8%) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Language skills (63%) 2. Employment opportunities for spouse (42%) 3. Availability of housing/schools (33%) 4. Support from friends/family (31%) 5. Employee remuneration/income (26%) 6. Cultural integration (26%) 7. Pension issues (23%) 8. Healthcare facilities (23%) |
| Eurobarometer Mobility Survey 2005 | PriceWaterhouseCoopers, Managing mobility matters, 2006 |

on the list. The language diversity within Europe clearly limits workers' mobility within an EU which, since January 2007, has 23 official languages. The consequence is that moving to another EU Member State is in almost every case accompanied by the expectation of having to learn or to use a new language. About six out of ten citizens expect to encounter language difficulties if they have to move to another country. Similarly, one European out of four expects to meet difficulties related to culture.

Almost 43% anticipate employment-related problems. Usually, this is related to finding a job for oneself. But people are also worried about their partners' prospects of finding employment, the recognition of their qualifications and the necessity of obtaining a work permit.

In addition there are worries about the housing market, health care, the transferability of their pension rights and access to childcare or schools. These factors are, however, of minor importance compared to the overwhelming language and culture-related problems.

Companies also stress these language problems as the most important individual factor hindering employee mobility. They also refer to the importance of policy-related factors that hinder employee movement within their company, especially the internal differences within Europe in tax systems and employment legislation. Business-related factors are not denied, but are considered less important. Differences in remuneration and the cost of relocating employees seem to be the main barriers here. This reaction confirms that employers regard the relocation of employees as a costly operation.

Policy initiatives to facilitate greater mobility

Since it seems clear that most Europeans do not want to move to another Member State, it can therefore be concluded that workers' mobility will not increase markedly as a result of new policies. It is, nevertheless, possible to create an environment that is more conducive to mobility.

- Understanding and speaking languages remains an important feature for mobile workers. Although English is becoming more and more the universal professional language within multinational environments, a continuing investment in the language skills of European citizens remains crucial.
- The transparency, recognition and transferability of skills, knowledge and competencies of workers play an important role in the integration of internationally mobile workers within Europe.
- There are still significant differences between Member States in terms of their social security systems, taxation systems and approach to health care provision, rules governing the transfer of pension rights and other institutional factors that impact on the ease of cross-border migration. Although it is unlikely that the EU's intention to invest in a better coordination of these different systems will in itself motivate more workers to be mobile, it will certainly facilitate the transition for those workers who do decide to move.

- The integration of workers into a new European country does not stop at the company door. People need new housing facilities, information on local resources, insights into the cultural traditions of the new region, language courses, and many other forms of support. A ‘one-stop shop’ for cross border mobile workers could make a significant contribution to lowering the barriers for migrating workers.

Job mobility and company policies

Patterns of mobility

The term ‘job mobility’ is used for any change of job, regardless of where the new job is located and is not usually associated with international migration. Nine out of ten employees that have changed employer in the past five years state that they have never lived in another country.⁷ It is clear that workers’ mobility usually occurs at a short distance and that international mobility is the privilege of a limited number of employees.

Although only a tiny percentage of the European population is involved in cross-national geographical mobility, most employees change jobs at some stage in their careers, with three out of four employees in the EU reporting that they have changed employer at least once. Mobility rates drop to a lower level when only recent job changes are taken into consideration: 32 per cent of all employees have changed jobs during the last five years, and eight per cent have changed employer in the last year. About 40 per cent of all European employees expect to change their employer in the next five years.⁸

Job mobility expectations change over the life course. Young people, still looking for a good fit between their own competencies and the job profile, express greater openness to job changes. Later, when the career path is more established and families are being built, the propensity to change jobs decreases. Furthermore, there seems to be a North-South divide within Europe in job mobility behaviour, with the Scandinavian and Baltic States showing the highest number of transitions on the labour market.

Benefits of changing jobs

A frequent change of job is generally considered to be a good thing for individuals, companies and labour markets.

Individual employees usually perceive their job change as a good career decision. People who have changed jobs express greater job satisfaction than

⁷ Own calculations on Eurobarometer Mobility Survey 2005.

⁸ European Foundation, *ibid.*

workers who have remained with the same employers. Workers who have moved once are also more likely to move again, another indication that job mobility is evaluated positively.⁹ Of course, where there is a choice, the search is not generally for change for its own sake but for a job which is better than the old one. A new job usually will offer at least one of the following: better pay, more responsibility, a more secure contract, better working time, a reduction of commuting time, good colleagues, or the chance to develop new competences. Job mobility can therefore be seen as an individual strategy to improve working conditions.

At a macro-level, the labour market also benefits from greater mobility. A high level of workers' mobility is an essential characteristic of a 'transitional labour market', a model often referred to in the context of innovative policy approaches. A transitional labour market is defined as one in which it is easy for employees to exchange one labour market position for another, albeit on a temporary basis. In the knowledge that this is possible, employees show that they are open to change. At certain stages in their careers, people may choose to spend time with their families, re-enter education or look for new employment opportunities. This leads to a more flexible labour market, where workers can move more fluidly to positions that suit their aptitudes and circumstances and overall unemployment levels can be reduced.

It has been suggested that successful transitional labour markets are based on a combination of risk management by policymakers and openness to change by workers. In these circumstances, policy choices ought to allow for an environment in which employees feel certain that they will be backed and rewarded by the system and structures in place when they decide to take a risky new career step. Thus, assuring a rapid reintegration into the labour market is essential, particularly when private projects come to an end or schemes founder unexpectedly. In this context, it is necessary to build up public trust by demonstrating that the outcomes of changes in work situations will not be catastrophic, whatever happens¹⁰ and that the resources exist to help workers overcome the challenges and adapt to new career paths. In other words, workers must be assured that support systems are in place to enable

⁹ Coppin L. & Vandenbrande T., *European workers' expectations on voluntary and forced job mobility*, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, Dublin, (forthcoming in 2007).

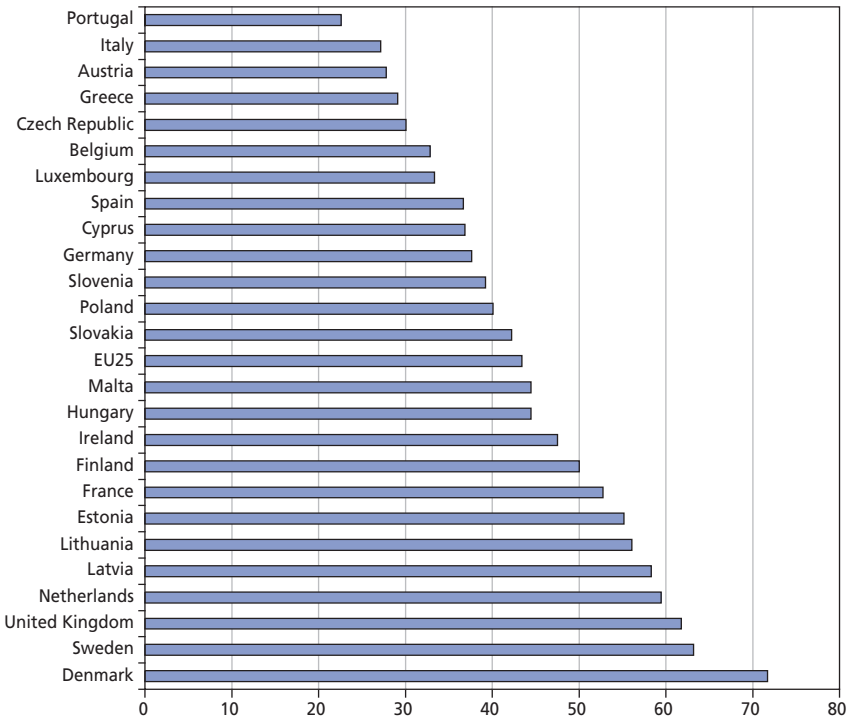
¹⁰ Vermeylen G., 'Flexicurity in the EU, an attempt to a first mapping'. ILP-conference, Amsterdam, 30 November–1 December 2006.

them to change their working lives without major inconveniences or risks for their future careers.

Not surprisingly, the highest job mobility expectations are found in Denmark, where the labour market is characterised by the ‘flexicurity’ model, a model that is often referred to in discussions on how to bring the transitional labour market concept into being. This model combines low protection against dismissal with high unemployment benefits and activation measures. It is, indeed, specifically designed to encourage high levels of workers’ mobility.

Companies can certainly benefit from higher mobility levels in the workforce, because they contribute to human capital development. This can be achieved in several ways: by offering on-the-job or off-the-job training, or by learning through doing new things. A change of job is a very effective way to extend

Figure 4: Expectations to change jobs in the next five years, in European countries (%)



Source: 2005 Eurobarometer Mobility Survey

this type of learning. Job mobility thus contributes directly to the development of new skills and there is evidence that the employability of employees usually increases when they have experience of multiple jobs.

Flexicurity at company level

Although companies naturally wish to retain their best employees, they are also aware of the benefits a mobile workforce can offer them. They therefore develop opportunities for their staff to change function from time to time. In some companies, there are systematic policies in place to ensure that staff change jobs regularly within the company. In a number of large companies, it is possible to identify policies that might be termed ‘flexicurity at a company level’. Under such policies, employees are expected to change jobs periodically within the company but, in return, are guaranteed lifelong employment.

Lifetime employment in the Electricité de France Group

‘At EDF, a norm of lifetime employment has developed over many years as a result of several different mutually supporting factors. (...) Because of EDF’s role as a lifetime employer (...) internal job mobility is an important tool for the company. The strategy it has adopted to encourage this can be defined as a system of “flexicurity”. In this model, in order to be able to maintain security, in the form of guaranteed employment, there’s a need for flexibility, in the form of internal job mobility. Annually, between 15,000 and 20,000 employees of EDF France (out of a total of 109,000 employees) change jobs within the company.’

J.C. Legros, Regional HR Manager

Lifetime employment at the Bank of Cyprus

‘Lifetime employment in the Bank of Cyprus results in considerable mobility within the group in each country. The policy is that senior managers should change jobs every four to five years in order to guarantee career progression within the company either vertically or horizontally. This creates what is in effect a policy of “flexicurity” within the company: guaranteed employment (security) can be provided to employees if they are internally mobile (flexibility).’

A. Artemiou, Training and Development Manager

Internal job rotation at Telefónica

‘In order to generate greater internal efficiency as well to keep its employees satisfied, Telefónica emphasises its Integral Mobility Model. The model has four main dimensions, or drivers: working mobility; internal mobility; training mobility; and new working spaces. (...) One measure to enhance internal mobility is the internal job rotation programme. High-level employees change regularly through the company’s executive rotation plan. Telefónica also has a pre-executive rotation pilot programme under which the norm of rotation is 15 per cent.’

J. Buqueras, HR Director Mobile Division

Multi-tasking at the Neorion Syros Shipyards

‘Interviews with the shipyard’s employees have confirmed that workers at Neorion Syros Shipyards still hope to spend their whole working lives at the shipyard. In the past, this was the normal situation. There was a tradition of fathers and sons working within the same organisation throughout their careers. (...) The shipyard has adopted two strategies to deal with the downturn in its activities. Firstly, it is developing a system of job mobility by training its employees so that they can take on multiple tasks. Secondly, the company has set up a Sectoral Mobility Support Centre in close cooperation with other stakeholders. The purpose of this centre is to provide personalised counselling and support for those workers who are most exposed to change.’

G. Andronikos, Training Manager

Employers clearly benefit from a relationship of long-term commitment with their employees. But lifelong employment does not necessarily equate with lifelong entitlement to work in the same job. In return for security of employment, employers expect a certain level of flexibility from their staff. In order to develop new skills and to ensure the continuing profitability of the enterprise, employees should be prepared to be ‘mobile’ in the sense that they should be ready for a change of environment, both professionally and socially, every four or five years. They should develop the ability to be employable in several different functions and/or settings over the course of their career within the company.

Whether employees like it or not, mobility is part of a modern career. Even if workers do not change from one company to another, they will certainly be expected to change their roles within the company over the years. Changing jobs has become a necessity in the current labour market.

Competence development

Different approaches

Mobile workers are clearly attractive to many companies because they have demonstrated their ability to be flexible and have increased their employability as a result of their diverse work experiences. Job changes can help in acquiring new skills and competences, both soft and hard, and contribute to the nurturing of human capital development. This is particularly important when adapting to current fast changes in the workplace which call for greater levels of flexibility and adaptability on behalf of workers to new labour market realities and conditions.

It must be ascertained that mobility can result in higher levels of productivity and employability. In order for this to happen, companies ought to be encouraged to invest more in lifelong learning policies that enable employees to acquire new competences in the course of their time in the organisation. Equally important is the recognition of qualifications acquired from work-related training through the establishment of mutually recognisable frameworks across Member States.

There are numerous approaches to competence development, many of them often complementing each other. These include formal training; various forms of informal or on-the-job training; or new forms of work organisation, in which colleagues work together on a project. Job mobility can also be a powerful strategy to ensure the development of new competences, since the best way to learn new things is usually by doing them. Job mobility policies can therefore be seen as a part of a broader competence development plan within companies.

The global competences model of Telefónica

‘Telefónica has a global competencies model used in all the countries where it operates and across all business sectors. These competencies have been identified to meet the needs of the company’s strategic plan and its culture and values: commitment to customers; integration into the environment; transparent communication and relationships; co-operation; personal development; and contribution to profits. These competencies are used to select new recruits, but also act as benchmarks in assessing individual employees’ career development plans. Job rotation programmes thus form an integral part of the development of these employees’ competences.’

J. Buqueras, HR Director Mobile Division

Competence development and the economic cycle

The seminar illustrated a range of different competence development models used by companies both in periods of expansion and of retrenchment. The economic cycle plays a critical role in determining companies’ attitudes towards their employees’ competence development. When companies are facing hard times, the dominant strategy is to find ways to redeploy workers who would otherwise face redundancy. In a context of expansion, the emphasis is on growing the competences of personnel so as to provide workers with attractive internal career paths and avoid facing internal skill shortages.

Survival strategies for shipyard employees

‘Syros Shipyards is struggling to keep afloat. An important part of its competence development is the Sectoral Mobility Support Centre. The company admits that it may not be able to find a place for all these workers in its workforce but hopes by offering them this support to increase their employability elsewhere.’

G. Andronikos, Training Manager

Annual development plans for Telefónica employees

‘All Telefónica employees (with the exception of call centre personnel) have an annual development plan to maintain or broaden the competencies they need to execute their job properly. These competencies may be company- or job-specific. The rapidly-changing environment of the telecom sector means that there is a continuous need for updating each individual’s skills and knowledge. The company uses a variety of learning channels including its own professional schools, e-learning and m-learning (learning on a mobile phone).’

J. Buqueras, HR Director Mobile Division

Role of companies

The picture that emerges of companies’ competence development strategies reveals that most training provided by companies is limited to job-specific tasks and does not consider providing workers with a wider range of skills and competences to prepare them for future new job opportunities. In an increasingly competitive world, companies are designing their training policies according to their own business needs, so as to improve their own performance and ensure their survival. It is therefore understandable that money spent on training is targeted towards company and job-specific requirements.

Furthermore, companies want to keep a tight rein on their resources and ensure a return on investment. There is a risk that providing their employees with a wider range of skills will make them more employable elsewhere and hence attractive candidates will be poached by competitors. This can act as a deterrent to providing training that goes too far beyond the immediate needs of the current job. Companies that fail to offer such training, however, can end up with a workforce with limited skills and consequently lower levels of occupational mobility.

This situation suggests that there may be a need for some kind of trans-company initiative to ensure workers’ competence development and career management. One starting point for such a strategy might be a further development of career guidance initiatives at a sectoral or economy-wide level. Through the mediation of such services, workers can obtain a neutral screening of their competence development and learn about the opportunities for further

skill development on the labour market. Providing career guidance does not necessarily lead to a change of employer. A counselling session may well lead to the conclusion that the worker needs vocational training or new challenges at his or her current workplace. It does, however, seem likely that improved career guidance will encourage more transitions on the labour market and thus lead to greater flexibility.

Such services not only benefit employees, but also offer interesting options to companies. Good career guidance to workers also benefits their employers. Neutral advice can enable them to reorient their own workers constructively, or encourage demotivated workers to look for new opportunities elsewhere, or enable them to identify new workers looking for new challenges that their organisation can provide. Career guidance should thus be regarded as a lubricant for an efficient labour market. It is an additional tool to ensure that workers' mobility will result in a better employer-employee match.

Transferability of competences and qualifications

Workers are increasingly expected to upgrade their skills continuously to be prepared to move between jobs, companies, sectors and regions. But a precondition for the success of such a lifelong learning effort is of course the recognition of this training and its transferability to other work environments, whether these are different companies, sectors or countries. At present, there are a number of obstacles facing people who want to build upon previous education or training in a new learning or professional environment. Thus, lifelong learning can only result in workers' mobility if learning outcomes are transferable to another work context.

The European Qualification Framework (EQF)

The European Commission is aware of the difficulties that arise in the transfer of learning results between companies, sectors and countries. An important policy measure to harmonise the evaluation of competences in different situations is the development of the European Qualification Framework (EQF). The EQF has been developed by the European Commission's Directorate General for Education and Culture in close cooperation with Cedefop. This tool will provide a common framework of reference to describe qualifications which will help Member States, employers and individuals to compare

qualifications across Europe's diverse education and training systems and should provide a neutral reference point based on learning outcomes to be completed by 2010.

The EQF has been developed after extensive consultation with Member States, the social partners and other stakeholders in order to ensure that the tool will be used. Its architects stress that the EQF will not be imposed on the Member States, but is intended to be implemented on a voluntary basis. EQF is not intended to replace national or sectoral frameworks; it is essentially a mechanism for making existing frameworks comparable with each other.

The core element of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) is a set of eight reference levels describing what a learner knows, understands and is able to do regardless of the system where a particular qualification was acquired. The EQF reference levels therefore shift the focus away from the traditional approach, which emphasises learning inputs (length of a learning experience, type of institution), to learning outcomes. Shifting the focus to learning outcomes in this way facilitates a better match between the needs of the labour market and education and training provisions, the validation of non-formal and informal learning and the transfer and use of qualifications across different countries and education and training systems.

The implementation process has already started in several countries, which augurs well for the further development of EQF. The Framework is used in a diverse way depending on the existing national framework of educational and vocational training systems. Countries that are convinced of the quality of their existing frameworks do not intend to change their system. There is the example of the UK, where the systems of Scotland, Northern Ireland, England and Wales were recently aligned through various qualification frameworks. The UK intends to screen the similarities between EQF and the existing national framework, and will not do much more than bring this into line with the EQF. But there are also countries where EQF can also be a tool for change, for instance in the reforms currently being planned of the educational systems in the new Member States, Bulgaria and Romania.

Sectoral initiatives

The EQF is not the first initiative that has been set up to enhance transparency in educational achievement of the workforce in different settings. Because such an international comparison of skills frameworks has not existed until now at EU-level, companies that operate in international environments have already worked out frameworks within which functional and competence frameworks in different countries can be related to each other. Pilot initiatives are not only to be found in individual companies, but also in joint initiatives at the sectoral level. In several sectors, the social partners have been working on the development of tools to make international differences in learning outcomes more transparent. In some cases, these projects have used the EQF as the reference framework for developing their own initiatives.

Sectoral initiatives designed to increase the transparency of workers' qualifications

The *European e-Competence Framework* is designed as a framework for employers' needs in the ICT industry. This tool was developed by a European working group consisting of both national and international representatives from the ICT industry, vocational training organisations, social partners, and other institutions. The working group's aim was to develop long-term human resources, qualifications and competence development strategies for the European ICT sector. The need for the group emerged from a common realisation amongst ICT companies operating in cross-national environments that they all faced a situation where national ICT frameworks existed alongside each other with no common agreement about how to talk about ICT knowledge, skills and competencies at a European level.

The goal is for this Framework to become the international HR management and planning tool for the ICT industry, public sectors, training bodies, certification institutions and individuals. For this reason, the working group has ensured that it is aligned not only with national frameworks (such as CIGREF, AITTS and SFIA), but also with the EQF and companies' internal planning and management schemes.

The European Federation for Welding, Joining and Cutting (EFW) has developed the *European Certification for Welding Personnel*, as an outcome of the EU-funded EUROWELD project. A harmonised certification system for welding personnel was developed for four occupational groups: welders, technologists, specialists and engineers. By comparing the individual characteristics and technical skills of welding professionals with the reference information in this system, one can deduce the learning needs of any given group of professionals. Since then, a modular training tool has been developed in order to address the training needs of individual workers involved in welding.

The project originally covered six European countries: Portugal, Belgium, Hungary, Italy, Poland, and the United Kingdom. Because of its success there, EFW has decided to extend the framework to cover the whole of Europe, using its Europe-wide network to validate the instruments in the different Member States.

Launched by the European Metal Union (EMU), the *EMU professional pass for metal workers* is a personal document which certifies the international experience of trained professionals in the metalworking sector. The metal sector has already developed such passes for construction and appliance building, agricultural machinery, maintenance and mechanical engineering, machining, mechanical electronics, and welding. Individual workers can use a database to check the level of their competencies on a regular basis. Once their information is validated by their supervisor, skilled workers receive the internationally recognised EMU-Pass.

The international recognition resulting from this scheme seems set to increase the exchange of professionals in the metal industry between European countries on the basis of comparable, recognisable and certified competences. Currently, only nine countries use the EMU-Pass: Germany, Luxembourg, Belgium, the Netherlands, Austria, Switzerland, Hungary, Italy and Slovenia. Nevertheless, the European Commission regards the EMU-Pass as a good sectoral interpretation of its own Europass. In 2007, it will be possible for both passes to be merged so that the Europass will benefit from the recognition scheme of vocational competences covered by the EMU-Pass.

It is clear that these initiatives have already demonstrated their ability to promote transparency and the recognition of workers' qualifications at both sectoral and European levels. However, the development and implementation of such projects depends largely on the willingness and understanding of social partners and other relevant agents.

Although these tools undoubtedly increase transparency in relation to workers' competences and thereby promote mobility, it cannot be assumed that this will necessarily result in a greater propensity of workers to migrate between regions and companies. Transparency is a necessary precondition for a fluid movement of workers on the European labour market but by itself it is not a sufficient condition. There is a need for greater attention to be paid to workers' mobility in the discussions around the development of these translation tools.

It might be concluded that these tools will not change mobility behaviour in a revolutionary way. Workers will not increase their mobility dramatically simply because they know the transferability of their competencies to other sectors or economies. However, even if they will not foster mobility on a large scale, these tools are nevertheless valuable adjuncts to a mobility policy with the capacity to improve the outcomes of workers' mobility. When employees are aware of the value of their qualifications and competences, they are better prepared for changing their jobs and will probably make better choices when switching to new professional environments. Employers will also benefit from this transparency which enables them to form a much better view of the real competences of candidates that apply to them for jobs. This will enable them to use these qualification frameworks as screening tools in selection processes.

Conclusions

The European Commission has a clear policy goal of fostering workers' mobility in line with the Lisbon objectives of improving employability and adaptability whilst increasing employment levels. This quantitative goal, however, needs to be complemented by qualitative ambitions: Europe does not just need more workforce mobility; it also needs to develop instruments that foster higher quality mobility. For the overall goal to be successful, Europe has to invest in making sure that transitions on the labour market take place smoothly and represent a step in the direction of getting people into jobs that suit them and contribute positively to their career development, as well as serving the needs of employers for a good match.

The company examples discussed in this EMCC Company Network seminar demonstrate that employers are developing a number of interesting initiatives in this respect. In enhancing the competence development of their human capital, companies have developed innovative human resource management approaches that allow them to formulate individualised personal development plans for their employees. These competence based models enable training activities to be properly targeted and support the internal horizontal or vertical mobility of individual employees. Competence development is thus closely linked to functional mobility within the company.

The seminar also highlighted the role of company-level flexicurity in fostering worker mobility. In this context, flexicurity refers to the situation whereby employees receive a minimum level of employment security and the employer benefits from functional flexibility. Thus, companies attempt to guarantee lifetime employment for employees who perform well, but, in return, expect these employees to accept functional changes within the company from time to time. The attractiveness of such employment with its possibility for intra-company mobility might mean that there will only be a moderate level of mobility between companies in Europe, but this does not mean that workers are immobile: they remain mobile within this stable employer-employee relationship and, in companies that are transnational in scope, may also move between countries whilst still retaining employment with the same employer.

Company perspectives still dominate the competence development of employees. However, transitional labour markets are better served by trans-

company initiatives that give workers more objectivity and choice in managing their careers properly. A useful role can be played by the further development of career guidance initiatives at a sectoral or economy wide level. These can be complementary to company-specific competence development strategies and can raise the quality of any subsequent mobility that does take place, whether within or between companies.

Another strategy to ensure better quality mobility is investment in the transparency of the qualification structure of the educational systems and of the workforce. This helps people decide where to go by giving them a reliable basis for estimating the value of their competences, and also helps companies to find the right person for the right job more easily. The development of the European Qualifications Framework and its capability of benchmarking national, sectoral and company-based qualification systems offers a good example of such transparency. This toolkit will not necessarily lead to more workers' mobility, but can engender improvements in the quality of the mobility that does take place.

Although workers' mobility usually takes place within national borders, there are workers who do move to another country to take up employment. In order to make international mobility easier, both trade union and employer representatives present at the seminar agreed on the need for improved coordination of social security, health and taxation systems in Europe. Long-distance worker mobility could become an easier step if EU Member States were to set up 'one-stop shop' organisations providing clear information on these legal matters, as well as providing information on more practical personal aspects such as language courses, local facilities, how to find housing, schools, and the cultural customs and traditions of the new region.

All of these factors were identified by seminar participants as being essential developments and contributions to be made by governments, social partners, companies and workers, in an attempt to create better conditions for quality mobility.

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Annex: Speakers at the seminar

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For Leuven Catholic University

Tom Vandenbrande

Sectoral actors

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Susana Escala (European Federation for Welding, Joining and Cutting, BIL-IBS)

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Maria Stylianou (UNICE)

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Artemis Artemiou (Training and Development Manager)

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